

VOLUNTEERS RETURN, MAKE ANNUAL EVENT AT GEODE

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DANVILLE - A group of union members returned to Geode State Park this weekend, hoping to promote volunteer service in Iowa's state parks.

Fifteen autoworkers from the Burlington Case tractor plant helped remove hazardous dead trees on Saturday, Dec. 10. The volunteers cleared out roughly 30 elm trees that had lined a parking lot and road. If left in place, the trees might have dropped onto cars during high winds, said Geode Park Manager Ulf Konig.

Saturday's event marked the second time the autoworkers lent their chainsaws, team spirit and hard work to a service effort at Geode. Last March, roughly 50 volunteers - all members of the United Auto Works local 807 - removed a decades-old pile of branches and several patches of storm-damaged trees.

By returning this winter, the union members hope to create an annual volunteer effort, said the event's organizer, union member Dave Fraise.

"I've been trying to get other people to volunteer, to help the state of Iowa," he said. "Once people see this happening every year, maybe they'll help out, too."

The volunteers provided a valuable service this weekend, easing the workload on a time-strapped park staff, Konig said.

"This would probably have been five to six days of work for me," he said. "They can get it done in four to five hours."

As they did last March, the volunteers will donate much of the lumber they removed, giving firewood to scout troops, youth groups and other campers at Geode.

Union members will work with park staff to create additional projects in the future, such as picnic table painting and other maintenance efforts, Fraise said. The autoworkers would also like to volunteer at other state parks, including some in Illinois where several members live.